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Key Organizational Management and Research Thrusts  
in Europe

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16 December 1980

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) A sabbatical at the University of Aston Management Centre, Birmingham, UK and visits to other similar UK and Dutch centers revealed major thrusts in the nature of organizational and management research in Europe. In general, there is considerable research of this kind being conducted in Europe. Its flavor is summarized in this report. The work differs from that being done in the United States in a number of ways. One is the emphasis on cross-national studies. There are a number		

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of such European projects involving centralized research designs but decentralized funding and implementation modes across institutions in different countries. While such research is done in the U.S., it does not play the dominant role demonstrated here. Neither is the centralized design, decentralized implementation mode common.

A second difference is the emphasis on research concerning work place participation. Though rare in the U.S., such schemes are commonplace in Europe. A third difference is in the way leadership research is treated in Europe and the U.S. Such work is more heterogeneous in Europe and is frequently treated as part of another project, not as a research area in its own right as in the U.S.

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Key Organizational Management and Research  
Thrusts in Europe

During the second semester of 1979-80 I spent a sabbatical at the University of Aston Management Centre in Birmingham, England. I was drawn there, first, by the Center's reputation based on the world-famous "Aston Studies" of organizational structure and technology and related variables. Though the studies ended some time ago, their impact remained and there was the opportunity to spend time with those who had been involved in the studies and who still remained at Aston. These were a part of the Organizational Sociology and Psychology (OSP) Group with which I was affiliated during my sabbatical visit.

Secondly, there was an opportunity to do joint work with a bright young scholar, Dian Hosking, who shared my interest in the study of leadership and who was very familiar with the US leadership literature. Finally, the visit allowed me to focus on some of the major organizational and managerial research thrusts taking place in the UK and on the Continent and to see how they might be similar to or different from US research. I was especially interested in how these researchers dealt with the area of leadership.

After consultation with knowledgeable people at Aston, it was decided that the best way to find out about the treatment of leadership was to hold a conference. Hosking and I did this at the Aston Management Centre in May. The conference, partially funded by ONR was the subject of a separate ESN report which will be published later. The major focus of this report is on key organizational and managerial research projects I observed at Aston and other British and continental institutions which I visited.

Research in Britain

Aston OSP Group. One major study effort of this group involves cross-cultural research. A recently completed study by Prof. John Child, the OSP Group head, and a West German colleague, Prof. Dr. Kieser, shows the flavor of this thrust. This investigation focuses on explanations for both differences and similarities in organization and management in British and West German firms.

While many researchers might ascribe these differences and similarities to differing cultures between the two countries, Child and Kieser argue that a more complete explanation considers not only culture, but also the nature of the economic and political system and contingency organization theory. The theory argues that certain imperatives for organization and management are imposed by the accumulation, and growing complexity, of productive resources as industrialism progresses, regardless

of the culture within which these operate. Thus, as organizational variables such as size, dependence, and technology increase or become more complex, this leads to more complex aspects of organizational structure, regardless of the culture within which this occurs.

Child and Kieser tested a number of hypotheses based on these arguments. This was done with carefully selected samples of managers from comparable UK and West German firms. In general, they found support for their thesis: that the nature of the economic/political system and contingency or industrialization imperative arguments operate in conjunction with culture to explain differences and similarities in management and organizational practices in the two countries.

Child was in the process of following up this cross-national thrust with a 5-country study of the impact of microprocessing technology. In addition to Britain and West Germany, the investigation would include less-developed countries such as Yugoslavia. That proposed investigation is of interest not only because of its focus, but also because it calls for a common research design, but with decentralized funding and implementation on the part of each country's researcher. Such a procedure has not been typical for this kind of research but is apparently being used with increasing frequency, as we shall see.

Child also has a keen interest in the changing role of the industrial supervisor in the UK, and his empirical work in this area forms another key research thrust. During my visit he was working on a book describing this changing role.

Dr. Peter Clark was involved with a second major set of projects in the OSP Group. The first of these was an ambitious one entitled, "Member Participation in Industrial Organizations," (MPIO). This is a 5-country study of the effects of workplace participation on worker attitudes, absenteeism, and productivity. The countries represented, besides the UK, are Israel, The Netherlands, Sweden, and West Germany. As with the microprocessing project above, a consortium of researchers from each of these countries worked out a common research design and then proceeded separately in terms of funding and implementation.

As suggested by the title, the focus was on the effects of worker participation in workplace activities. Such participation is considered extremely important in many European nations, and, indeed, is mandated by law in countries such as Sweden.

The research considers plants with and without formally designated participation systems. It also considers informal participation. The association of participation with felt influence and a number of attitude and performance measures is examined. Several organizational and individual

background factors are also investigated as possible contingency variables which could make a difference in the relationship of participation to other variables. Data are obtained from questionnaires and company records. The design is a relatively complex one and is consistent with the trend toward more complex and sophisticated studies in the US.

During my stay at Aston, results from the UK samples were available but these were only preliminary results. The research was in different stages of completion in the countries involved. The Swedish portion was, perhaps, the furthest along.

Another ongoing research thrust of Clark is concerned with the study of management systems in seasonally and weather-influenced industries. In many industries, there is a dramatic difference in the level of managerial activities and indeed in the kinds of activities performed as a function of seasonality and weather. In his preliminary research, Clark contrasted management activities in a sugar-beet processing plant with those in a can-making firm. Both are seasonal, but the seasonality and weather effects are less predictable in the can-making organization. This project is a part of Clark's more general interest in the impact which time exerts on managerial and organizational variables.

To round out the picture of the organizational work being done by the OSP Group, I mention a research project I am conducting in conjunction with Dian Hosking. This involves the testing of a new leadership model developed in the US by Dick Osborn and me. It includes environment, technology, and organization-structure variables in addition to more traditional individual and small-group concepts. Hosking and I were interested in testing the model in Britain for comparison with earlier results obtained in the US.

Just before I returned to the US we obtained a sample of fire stations in a major British metropolitan area. The model is to be applied under both crisis (at a fire) and non-crisis (in the station) situations. We hope to obtain a similar sample of US fire departments and to look at the combined impact of cultural values and leadership in addition to the other variables in the study. Hosking is also interested in other aspects of leadership and with that in mind she will spend several months in the US working with leadership scholars at the University of Southern California.

Oxford University Centre for Management Studies. Another major UK management center is that at Oxford. Its research is much more heavily applied than that of Aston and many other British institutions. This is because the Center's clientele consists almost exclusively of experienced managers.

The importance of this emphasis on the development of experienced managers is articulated in one project that examines the future of management development in Europe and in another that focuses on identifying industrial relations training needs for British middle managers. Both are multi-investigator, multi-year, externally funded studies. In the first, we see once again a cross-national focus. While these projects show the importance with which research on management development is regarded, perhaps the best-known work of the Oxford Management Centre is that of Rosemary Stewart. For more than a decade, Stewart has been involved in research focusing on the nature of managerial work. She has developed a model which looks at managerial jobs in terms of demands, constraints, and choices. Currently she is conducting a project which seeks to use these factors to identify and classify the extent to which managerial jobs are similar or different and to discover the ways in which one jobholder can do a job differently than another.

Along with this, Stewart has just completed a research project which applies her model to district administrators in the British National Health Service. These two studies, while they make contributions to the scholarly literature, have an applied flavor in terms of their implications for identifying training needs and the like.

Her work is receiving increasing attention in the US from those who have become disenchanted with questionnaire research and who believe that there is a need for observational studies of what it is that managers actually do. Though most people would consider leadership to be one important part of a manager's behavior, researchers examining leadership have tended to be different people from those investigating managerial behavior. Stewart is now in the process of preparing a much-needed paper which will build on her research and which will attempt to integrate the two streams of work. This is one step toward bringing the Americans studying leadership and the Europeans studying various aspects of managerial behavior closer together.

MRC Social and Applied Psychology Unit. An interesting contrast to Aston and Oxford is the Medical Research Council's Social and Applied Psychology Unit at the University of Sheffield. This is one of some 60 MRC units, each with a somewhat different mission. The unit places heavier emphasis on research than the researchers at Aston and Oxford do and its research tends to have more of a psychological than a managerial flavor. While the MRC provides much support for the research, a considerable amount of funding is also provided by other agencies on a project-by-project basis.

The Sheffield unit's mandate is quite broad: "To carry out research into psychological well-being and effectiveness with particular reference to work and employment." Within these guidelines the unit is particularly



concerned with motivation, ability, interpersonal relationships, and cognitive processes. Some studies are also stipulated to have a practical, change-oriented intention. The orientation toward change calls for an emphasis upon experimental or quasi-experimental projects and to longitudinal field studies in addition to cross-sectional research.

There are currently 8 principal projects and 17 ancillary projects in various stages of completion. The principal projects cover such diverse areas as employee participation and job redesign, stress, coping and psychotherapy, and young people starting at work. The ancillary projects range from absenteeism to conversational structure.

Prof. Peter Warr heads the unit. Its staff members have authored nearly 20 books since 1973. They have been involved with the publication of nearly 250 articles and papers in that time.

In terms of breadth of coverage, the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan would appear to be a comparable US unit.

#### Research on the Continent

I was informed that Holland was a key center of research activity on the Continent. Fortunately, I was able to visit a variety of institutions located in different parts of the country.

Free University of Amsterdam. At the Free University of Amsterdam I spent time with Prof. Dr. Peter Drenth, head of the Industrial and Organizational Psychology Department, and several of his staff. Again, Drenth's unit is heavily involved in cross-national research. This essentially involves projects in the following areas: worker participation, the impact and development of tests in developing countries, and the meaning of work.

The worker participation research is divided into two sections: a portion of a project called, "Industrial Democracy in Europe" (IDE), and a portion of a project labeled, "Decision Making in Organizations" (DIO). The first study has much the same purpose and considers many of the same variables as Clark's MPIO project mentioned earlier. It involves some 25 social scientists from 12 countries: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, West Germany, Holland, Italy, Israel, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, and Yugoslavia. And again, it involves a common research design across the consortium, but has decentralized funding and implementation.

As with MPIO, the countries were chosen because of the wide variety of worker participation schemes which they provide. Researchers were interested in: (1) assessing the impact of different formal, legally prescribed participation systems on actual patterns of influence, power

and involvement in organizations; and (2) examining effects of different participation patterns on attitudes, aspirations and reactions of employees. As with MPIO, a number of individual and organizational contingency variables were also part of the model.

The project is further along than MPIO, and Oxford University Press is publishing the results in a 2-volume set. Drenth and his associates are responsible for the Dutch portion of the study.

The DIO project examines participative decision making in Holland, the UK, and Yugoslavia. It complements the IDE projects in two ways. First, IDE looks at indirect participation via works councils, etc., whereas DIO considers direct leader-follower relations and participative styles in work groups. Second, DIO is a 4-year longitudinal study while IDE is cross-sectional.

Both involve focusing on participation for different kinds of decisions, and in this way they differ from other projects such as MPIO. The decision-making variables considered in DIO are akin to those used in Vroom's well-known model in the US.

A second cross-national thrust involves the development and validation of test instruments in a number of underdeveloped nations. Rather than being used for job-selection purposes, these are used for the selection of individuals entering institutions. Besides the practical contributions of this research, it has also been useful in extending testing theory and in helping to determine the importance of culture in the context of testing.

The third major project, just getting underway, is an 8-nation comparison of the meaning of work. This study has major US participation in the person of George England at the University of Oklahoma.

University of Amsterdam. In this visit I conferred with Prof. Dr. Henk Thierry and his staff. His unit is involved with a number of important studies: (1) Reward systems; (2) Shift work; (3) participation; (4) Organizational development and change; and (5) A long-term study of aging workers.

While separate studies have been done in each of these areas, much recent work has combined aspects of reward systems with shift work and with participation. In addition, Thierry is responsible for the Dutch portion of MPIO.

Groningen and Tilberg. I concluded with visits to the State University in Groningen, in the far north of Holland and the Catholic University in Tilberg, in the south. At Groningen, there are three ongoing projects in the leadership area that are consistent with US directions. The first

of these uses many samples over an extended time period to study the effects of leadership behaviors of executives in a business game. The second compares flexibility in leadership behaviors in Dutch and US firms and is connected to research in the US at The University of Central Florida. The third considers worker participation as it is influenced by leadership and task variables. Other work at Groningen is concerned with variables related to decision making at the municipal government level.

A major thrust at Tilberg involves looking at organizations as coalitions of interest groups. Interests and power are key concerns. For example, Tilberg researchers are trying to determine how important coalition formation is in explaining organizational outcomes, as compared with more traditional studies of structure.

### Conclusions

My general conclusions from these visits and from the leadership and managerial behavior conference are that there are a number of important differences between the research I observed and US organizational research. One is in the emphasis on cross-national work. While cross-national research is being conducted in the US, it does not seem to play the dominant role that it plays in the UK and on the Continent. The centralized research design and decentralized funding and implementation across institutions also appear to be different.

A second difference is the emphasis on participation. Not only was that revealed in my visits to universities but it came up several times in the leadership conference. The research, of course, reflects the importance of worker participation schemes in Europe.

Finally, the leadership and managerial behavior conference revealed much more heterogeneity in looking at the topic area than is typically shown in US leadership research conferences.